

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #94

Isaiah 65:1-16

I recently heard two Christians talking and one was saying to the other that she had just received an answer to one of her prayers. What she actually meant by this is that she had just received a “yes” answer to one of her prayers. The other lady, who was also in the discussion, said that she had been praying for something for quite awhile but had not received the answer yet.

I think there have been times in all of our lives when we could be on both sides of the spectrum. There have been times when we could say God answered the prayer, and there have been other times we could say He hasn’t answered the prayer yet. But perhaps we need to consider at times that God has answered the prayer and His answer is “no.”

When we pray, most of us want a “yes” answer to our prayers and we want it quickly. But sometimes God does not answer that way and never is that more evident than when we come to **Isaiah 65**. We may recall that in the previous chapters of **Isaiah 63-64**, Isaiah has been humbly pouring out his heart to God asking Him to mercifully shower Israel with His blessings once again. **In Isaiah 65-66, God responds to Isaiah’s prayer and Isaiah and Israel finally receive God’s answer.**

What we see in this particular part of God’s response is this:

BECAUSE ISRAEL HAS REJECTED GOD AND MADE HIM ANGRY, HE WILL PERMIT HER TO EXPERIENCE SOME NEGATIVE JUDGMENTS; BUT HE WILL ALWAYS PRESERVE A REMNANT FROM ISRAEL, AND ONE DAY ISRAEL WILL RECEIVE ALL OF HIS PROMISED BLESSINGS.

In this one chapter we get an amazing glimpse of the entire prophetic plan of God. God carefully explains His position and lays out His future. This is God speaking and we do not want to miss what He has to say. Much of what God reveals here will take place in the final 3½ years of the Tribulation, the time of Jacob’s trouble. The reason for the trouble is God is angry with Israel.

PRAYER REQUEST ANSWER #1 – God reveals what He sovereignly permitted. **65:1**

G. Campbell Morgan said when you first start reading this chapter it almost seems like God is answering Isaiah’s prayer in a desirable way. But when you examine the text closely, that certainly is not the case (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, p. 215).

The Hebrew word “permit” is in the Niphal stem which means God, in and of Himself, allowed Israel to approach Him and have access to Him (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 210). What God is saying is, in My pure grace I permitted Myself to be found by the nation Israel. I permitted this nation to have a relationship with Me. They did not seek Me or call out to Me, but I revealed Myself to her and allowed her to have a personal relationship with Me.

Now there is some discussion pertaining to this verse as to whether or not this refers to the fact that God sent His program from Israel to the Gentiles or whether this refers only to Israel.

There are good Bible scholars on both sides of the matter. It is certainly dispensationally true that because of Israel's rebellion, He has permitted His program to reach out to Gentile nations who were certainly not seeking God. Actually, the Apostle Paul quotes this very verse from Isaiah in Romans 10:19-21, and he uses it in reference to both the Gentiles and Israel.

Certainly any nation like Israel or any individual like us ought to realize that we didn't just stumble into a relationship with God on our own. God permitted it. He permitted us to find Him.

Any of us who know the Lord, should stand in total awe that Almighty Holy God would have anything to do with any of us. Any person or nation who has a relationship with God has it because God permitted it.

PRAYER REQUEST ANSWER #2 – God reveals what He graciously did. 65:2

God spread out His hands to His people inviting them to come to Him and respond to His Word, but they follow their own thoughts and walk in ways that are not good. God had open arms always ready to help His people and do wonderful things for His people and they would not come to Him. That concept of "spreading out hands" is one that communicates that God was giving His people an open and loving invitation for them to come back to Him. God is very gracious to His erring family members. He spreads out His hands and invites them to come back to Him and His Word.

But there were two specific responses to this gracious invitation:

(Response #1) - God's people continually walked in ways not good.

The word "good" means that God's people were living their lives in ways that were not beautiful and pleasant and agreeable in the sight of God (*Ibid.*, p. 319).

(Response #2) - God's people continually followed their own thoughts.

Now the word "thoughts" is one that means that God's own people actually meditated and calculated by their own reason and understanding their own way to live, which didn't square with God's Word (*Ibid.*, p. 311). They did not just make some emotionally stupid decision; they actually thought about this and pursued it even though it was contrary to God.

Now think about what is revealed here. God offers His people, who have walked in ways not good and who have followed their own thoughts, an open invitation to come back to Him so He can bless them.

Perhaps you find yourself in this state right now. You made some kind of commitment to the Lord years ago, but you have been living life and doing things that are not good.

Perhaps you have been following your own thoughts of life and have never even considered the Word or will of God. God graciously invites you to come back to Him.

PRAYER REQUEST ANSWER #3 – God reveals what Israel rebelliously did. **65:3-5a**

Instead of Israel responding to God, she thumbed her nose at the gracious invitation of God. What Israel specifically did is to continually provoke God to His face. The Hebrew word “provoke” is one that means to irritate and anger God by continually doing things He finds very offensive (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 409). The Hiphil stem of the participle means that this action of angering God has been completely caused by His own people. In other words, they blatantly rebelled right in the face of God.

God graciously spread out His hands to His people inviting them to turn to Him for His blessings, and they continually refused and actually did things that angered God right in front of Him.

It has often perplexed students of Scripture in view of the things listed as to just when Israel committed these sins named here. There does not seem to be any specific text that we may identify that reveals when these things all happened. There are two simple solutions to this seeming perplexity. **First**, no one but God saw these things because they were done at night in secret (**65:4**); **Second**, these things will specifically prevail during the Tribulation when demonism will flourish (i.e. Rev. 9:20-21). But whether it was Isaiah’s day or our day, instead of turning to the Lord and responding to His grace, Israel continually provoked God to anger.

Now God specifically lists four provoking actions that truly angered Him:

(Anger Provocation #1) - They offered their sacrifices and offerings in pagan places, like in gardens. **65:3b**

God demanded that Israel worship Him in His Temple, and instead of doing that, many invented their own forms and places of worship. Notice they burned sacrifices on altars of “bricks.” God was clear that His altars were to be made of uncut stones, not bricks (Deuteronomy 27:6).

(Anger Provocation #2) - They actually went into cemeteries where the dead are buried and would spend the night among the graves. **65:4a**

They were not walking in cemeteries to read epitaphs on tombstones; they were trying to communicate with the dead. This is evil satanic stuff.

(Anger Provocation #3) - They ate things God classified as unclean. **65:4b**

When God was specifically dealing with the nation Israel, He told them they were not to eat pork (Leviticus 11:7-8). They blatantly did just the opposite of what God told them to do. Although in the Grace Age we are not under the dietary restrictions, the principle of involving ourselves in things unclean is still one that can anger God.

In II Corinthians 6:17, the Apostle Paul applies the same principle of not touching unclean things to the Church Age. He challenges us to stay far away from that which is idolatrous and do not touch unclean things. If we do what Paul says, God will welcome us with open arms. Although this does not refer to dietary matters, it certainly refers to unclean sinful matters. The point is - do not touch what is unclean.

(Anger Provocation #4) - They arrogantly asked God to stay away from them and arrogantly said they were holier than even God. **65:5a**

It is from this verse that we derive the expression “holier-than-thou.”

This is what most people want - freedom of religion. Freedom to invent their own way of worship. Most don't want to be told you must worship God in accordance to His Word and will. Even most churches say we want freedom to do what we want. Why do you think more and more churches are featuring women ministers? Why do you think that more and more churches are getting away from reverent worship? Why do you think it is hard to find a church that carefully teaches God's Word? Because people want their own agenda, not God's.

These are proud religious people. Don't miss this point - **people involved in false religion that is not after the truth of God are proud of themselves and their religion.** People who go to churches where they are not really carefully taught God's Word are proud of their church. They don't care if the church ever takes them through one book of the Bible. They have their worship, their rituals and liturgy and they are proud of it. They would rather have that than an accurate understanding of the Word of God.

These were God's people who refused to move in the ways of God but went their own way. They were involved in evil idolatrous worship including occult activity. They arrogantly defied God and His Word.

As one writer observed, this is just a partial list of the evil things Israel did. Truth is they broke all the commandments of God.

PRAYER REQUEST ANSWER #4 – God reveals what He will futuristically do. **65:5b-16**

God says there is smoke in My nostrils and a fire that burns all the day. In other words, God is very angry with Israel all the time and there is no break in His anger. It burns all the time. It is possible for a nation of God or a child of God to truly anger God to the point where He is red hot mad.

That is exactly what Israel has done. God says I will not keep silent about what I am going to do. God says I will respond four ways:

(Response #1) - I will repay Israel for everything she has done. **65:6-7**

God says they have been idolatrous and have committed depraved sin. They have scorned Me and My Word and they will pay. One famous old preacher used to preach a message he entitled “Payday Someday.” That is exactly what God reveals here. Payday someday.

A nation or individual may dabble in the most vile and depraved things for awhile, but all can know there will be a “payday someday.”

(Response #2) - I will preserve a remnant of Israel for the sake of My servants. **65:8-10**

This is amazing grace, for in spite of their evil sin God would not destroy them. God says I will not destroy all of Israel. I will bring a remnant offspring through Israel and that remnant will be My heir. God says I will choose certain ones who will inherit the land I have promised to Israel. This eschatologically is a reference to the 144,000 of the Tribulation and their converts (Rev. 7).

We may observe from **verse 9** that there is a direct mention of Jacob and Judah. We know that One would come from Jacob and Judah who would be instrumental in all of this happening. That One is none other than Jesus Christ.

In **verse 10**, two specific land places are mentioned, Sharon and the valley of Achor. Sharon is a fertile coastal plain area south of Mount Carmel, a place that had already been taken by the Assyrians. The valley of Achor was located south of Jericho. Hosea the prophet said that this place would become a “door of hope” for Israel (Hosea 2:15). What God is promising is that one day He will bless Israel in her land and she will own every inch of it including the most fertile places in the Middle East. Those areas presently controlled by Arabs will one day be hers.

(Response #3) - I will slaughter many from Israel for the evil they did. **65:11-12**

Notice what is mentioned in this text, they forsook God and worshipped the god of Fortune. They worshipped a god of destiny or fate. Instead of worshipping the true God of the Bible at the prescribed place of worship which is at His Temple in Jerusalem, they forgot about God and worshipped their own god. They offered their food and drink offerings to these idols. God says I will slaughter all who did it. This massive slaughter will occur during the Tribulation.

There are many today who are worshipping similar gods. Their god is fortune or commerce or sports or financial speculation. Even people of God get sidetracked into putting other things as more important than Him.

God gives His people plenty of time to respond to Him. Before He strikes His people down, He offers them plenty of grace. But there is a limit to it, and if His people persist in not responding to Him, He will judge severely.

(Response #4) - I will honor My servants from Israel and curse those evil from Israel.
65:13-16

In these verses we get a great contrast between what will happen to those who serve God and those who don't. God sees two kinds of people in Israel, those who serve God and those who forsake God. In these verses there are six major contrasts:

(Contrast #1) - Those who serve God will eat, and those who don't will go hungry. **65:13a**

(Contrast #2) - Those who serve God will drink, and those who don't will go thirsty. **65:13b**

(Contrast #3) - Those who serve God will rejoice, and those who don't will be put to shame.
65:13c

(Contrast #4) - Those who serve God will be happy in heart, and those who don't will be heavy in heart. **65:14**

(Contrast #5) - Those who serve God will have a blessed name, and those who don't have a cursed name. **65:15**

(Contrast #6) - Those left on the earth will be blessed by God and completely forgiven.
65:16

These verses in Isaiah inform us that as God's people we can live our lives in ways that please God or anger God. One is a path of blessing and the other is a path of cursing. Which is it for us?